THE SPECTRUM SHOW
Magazine

SCRAMBLE

ARCADE CLONE SHOOT OUT

SINCLAIR'S MICRODRIVE
REVIEWED

FLASHBACK 85

GAME REVIEWS

HARDWARE

SPECIAL FEATURES

Includes material not in the show!

EDITORIAL & CONTENTS

24
SCRAMBLE
SHOOT OUT

20
ZX MICRODRIVE
REVIEW

FEATURES

GAME REVIEWS

EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to issue 4 of The Spectrum Show Magazine.

I think this issue was the fastest I have ever completed one, mainly because of the holiday around Christmas when I had time to collate the material and do some graphic and layout work.

I would just like to mention From Bedrooms To Billions, the movie/documentary that was recently released on real media. The download version has been available for a while, but now you can actually buy it on DVD or Blu-Ray.

(www.frombedroomstobillions)

The movie follows the British gaming industry from its roots to the modern day and has a lot of Spectrum material included. There is also interviews with industry greats like Mathew Smith, and as I received my copy on Christmas Eve, it was a brilliant present.

On the subject of presents, I recently purchased *Volcanic Dungeon* by Carnell with a view to reviewing it on the show (which I will at some point) and in the middle of the manual I found a hand drawn grid map and placements for items and monsters.

It seems the previous (or original) owner had spent a long time playing the game and had meticulously mapped the entire dungeon. I wonder if they are still around, maybe even still interested in the Spectrum, maybe even watch the show! Wow, how cool would that be...

Its inevitable that thirty year-old games will not be in pristine condition, and in fact several of my own collection has things written on the inlay cards, usually pokes or high scores.

Another recent purchase was Tasword +3, and included with the package was a few blank discs. Yes, you guessed it, they contained letters to family members about the everyday mundane.

I don't suppose people thought about personal data back then, certainly not to the extent they do today, and yet here I have names and addresses (and a few details) about someone who at sometime used their Speccy to write letters. Thought provoking or scary? You can chose.

I wonder what I left in my old games when I sold them all in 1985?

HELP NEEDED!

If you want to write a review or article for this magazine, please contact my via my blog.
www.randomkak.blogspot.com

ANTI PIRACY DEVICE

In previous news we heard about an anti-copying system that was so good the MOD confiscated it. Now there seems to be another similar product, this time produce by MapSoft a subsidiary of Maplin.

The system incorporates special code to detect if the cassettes being used are original. The cassettes themselves are built differently to normal tapes, and this is what the software looks for when checking.

Although there is little detail, it seems the cassettes have some kind of hardware inside that works together with the code in the game.

Incentive Software are amongst the first companies to be using the method of protecting their games.

WIN FOR DEUS-EX

Deus Ex Machina has been voted program of the year at the CTA awards despite selling in small quantities. The Commodore 64 version has sold just 12 copies, and although the Spectrum version beat this, the number is still tiny compared to the average title.

This is because some distributors are refusing to stock it, meaning it won't get delivered to your local computer shop. The reason for this? Difficult times in the industry has been quoted, but other games still manage to get on the list.

Automata also decided to supply the game to distributors who pay on order rather than running the risk of never getting paid.

FAST COMING SOON

A new government bill that aims to make software pirates pay, is going through it's second reading in parliament.

Proposed by Conservative MP William Powell on behalf of the Federation Against Software Theft, if successful it could mean pirates being sent to prison for up to 2 years.

Powell quoted that £150m was lost due to piracy in 1984, and although in hindsight, these figures often quoted are grossly misrepresented, professional pirates, those who copy and then sell the games, do damage the industry.

SPECTRUM OPUS

A new disc system has been announced by Opus.

The unit will house a 3.5inch drive in a large metal case that attaches to the back of the Spectrum and includes a joystick interface, printer port and through connector.

The unit will be available from Boots and although there has been no price mentioned, the makers claim it will be a nice surprise to Spectrum owners.

SPECTRUM CHAT

If you own a modem and are connected to Micronet 800, you will have the ability to chat to one of a number of celebrities that are being lined up for the service.

Users can type in questions and have them answered in real time by the people at the other end. The Celebrity Chatline will start on 20th March with Michael Feldman from the TV show 4 Buffs On 4.

GREMLINS ARE HERE

The official game for the movie Gremlins has been released by Adventure International.

The graphic adventure sees Billy trying got save the town from the crazy animals, and includes animation and characters from the film.

AUTOMATA SPLIT

Mel Croucher and Christian Penfold, better known to Spectrum fans as Automata, have split up, with Mel leaving the company.

Christian will continue to run the software house, famed for its comic adventures such as Pimania and Uncle Groucho.

CARD STORAGE

A new type of mass storage device has been produced by Japanese company Astar International.

Using a small interface, data can be stored on credit card sized ROMs that can have several functions.

Some can hold read-only games, some can be used like EPROMs, and even battery backed up cards are in development.

The interface required to use these card will be cheap, but the cards themselves may cost as much as £20 each.

Companies like Ocean and Sinclair are all looking at the device, with interfaces planned for the Commodore, QL and possibly the Spectrum. The MSX already has an interface which can load games in less than 5 seconds.

BYE BYE BUG BYTE

Bug Byte software have been liquidated, and have called in the same team that dealt with Imagine software.

The computing veteran has been producing computer games for over 3 years with its most famous title being Manic Miner.

The rights to that game though, were taken by its author Mathew Smith when he left to join a new company, Software Projects.

SUPERMAN FLYS IN

After months of negotiation, Superman The Game will finally be available for a variety of home computers.

Beyond software will release the game later in the year under its Monolith label.

The game is said to have cartoon like graphics in an arcade style setting.

This could be the first of many games based on superheroes if the recent run of TV tie-in games is anything to go by. Although the quality of some of those leave a lot to be desired!
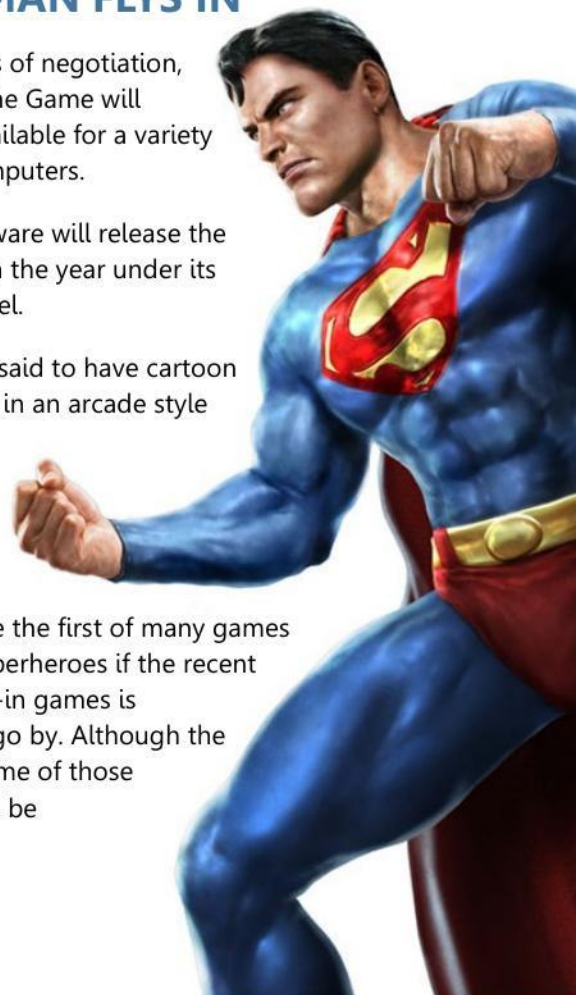
SMUGGLER'S COVE

Quicksilva 1983

As top agent for the Royal Duchy, you have heard many rumours of pirate's treasure, horded by Black Beard himself, but until this day they were just that, rumours.

After a fierce storm, you find a log book washed up on a Cornish beech that seems to indicate that these shores were used by pirates and that a cave nearby was used to store their treasure.

Climbing up to the cave, you scramble inside but slip on the wet surface, and plummet downwards into darkness. There Is no way back; your only option is try and find the treasure and the way out. So starts this graphic adventure.

The game uses the top third of the screen to represent the locations with line-drawn pictures that do an average job of conveying the caves. Some change depending on your actions, for example the waterfall location will change to display the rope if you choose to throw it to allow you to climb to the ledge.

The text is all in capitals which is a little off putting, and the language is all 'pirate speak', so you sometimes have to re-read the responses to fully understand what is being conveyed. That said, the brief de-

scriptions coupled with the graphics provide a nice atmosphere.

The puzzles are, for the most part, logical although how anyone would guess that you had to 'FLOAT MUNCHIES' down the river is beyond my thinking.

There is the usual assortment of puzzles too, with keys required for doors and ropes required to access higher locations. There is also the lateral type situations for example to stop the rats attacking you, the cat has to be with you. To get the cat to follow you, you must be holding the fish, and so on.

One thing that I didn't like was the possibility of death at several locations in the game. This I think is a little harsh and it would have been far better to move the player back a few stages or lose them some objects. Instead, you find you have to start all over again just because you didn't wear the boots or walked into a dark area without the torch being on – all very disruptive.

Overall then, not a bad game that is quite easy to progress with some easy and logical puzzles. It's a pity about the colour scheme and capitals, but if you can get over this, you'll probably enjoy this game.

KONG STRIKES BACK!
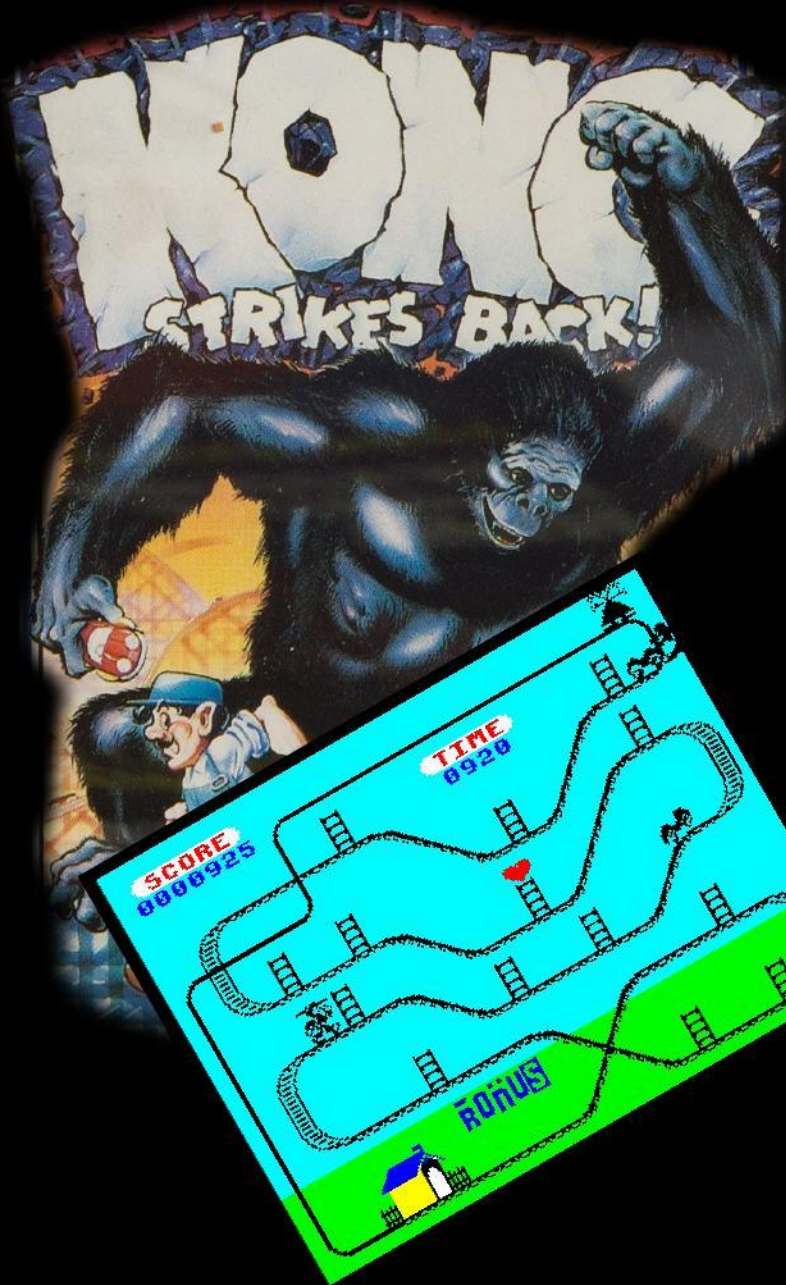
Ocean 1984

you. Some ladders also have bonuses above them.

The track is a one-way route, and the whole game is a test of timing and coordination.

You have to constantly keep an eye on the cars even if they aren't on your particular bit of track, as they can still kill you if you come into contact with them.

The game-play is nice, allowing you to progress easily, and there aren't too many sudden deaths.

The graphics are also nice and apart from the colours, look similar to the arcade game.

Sound-wise, it's pretty sparse with just sounds for walking, throwing bombs and dying, and they are all the same sound effect.

Control is crisp and there isn't any lag, making the whole experience great. You have a wide choice of controls including: Kempston, Sinclair, Fuller and cursor joysticks as well as definable keys.

The tracks change each level and after a set number of levels, Kong himself appears. There isn't any change in gameplay for these end of level screens though, and completing it just takes you to the next set of levels with additional obstacles.

Sometimes the game pace can be slow, especially when you are waiting for the cars to pass underneath you, but despite this, the game is still addictive enough to want to get further and see the other levels.

A good game then, and a nice change from the usual shooting or platform variants.

Initially you would be forgiven for thinking that Kong Strikes Back is the follow up to Kong, but it isn't. Released in 1984 by Ocean the game is actually a clone of another arcade game Mr Do's Wild Ride.

The cassette inlay claims you have to rescue the damsel, who is being held captive by the mighty Kong, at the top of the fairground ride.

You have to dodge the rollercoaster cars as well as pies and springs, presumably thrown by ape himself.

You are armed with bombs, that when thrown, will blow up the cars. This can be used instead of climbing the ladders and on some levels, has to be used as you cannot avoid the cars if you want to complete the screen. You have a limited number though, so use them sparingly.

Unlike the original Kong game, there are no ladders to the level above, instead the ladders allow you climb above the track to let the cars pass so they don't kill
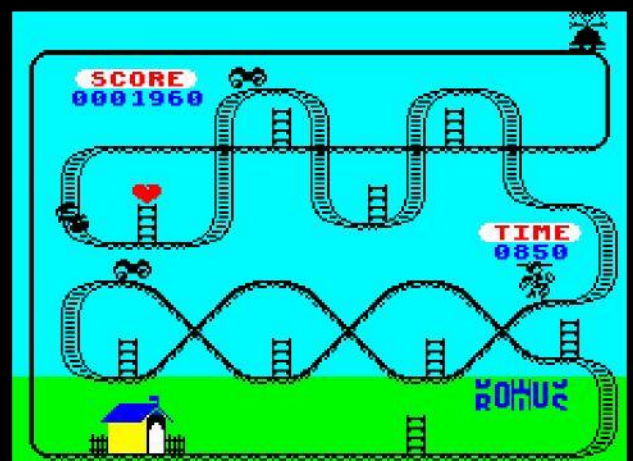
CHAMPIONSHIP
JETSKI
Simulator

Codemasters 1989

Championship JetSki Simulator, released by Codemasters in 1989, was a version of the 1986 arcade game Super Sprint with a few twists of course, but it was also the forerunner to the Codemasters' future game, Micro Machines.

This version is set on water and replaces the cars with JetSkis, just in case you didn't get that from the title.

The game comes with two versions, the easy one on side A, and the harder one on Side B.

Once the sampled speech is over, we get the title screen, allowing the selection of controls.

There are only three keys required, left, right and accelerate, and you can also use a variety of joysticks.

Once the game gets under way we get a really nice playing area, very colourful but not so easy to tell what is safe and what you should avoid. It's also difficult to see which jetski you are controlling initially.

The control is good, mimicking the inertia and control of the jetski, allowing for drift based on your speed, this makes controlling it tricky but realistic. You have to plan ahead and make sure you are lined up with the gaps.

Anything that slows you down like the green weed or bumping into obstacles will mean you may not hit that time limit.

You also have to contend with the other riders, three of them, who all seem to be experts.

This meant that the first half an hour of playing got me nowhere. As I got used to the control system, my progress gradually improved although I still never managed to win.

I did at least qualify, which means completing the course in a given time limit, this meant I could then proceed to the next race and a different course.

The courses vary in layout with numbered gates that indicate the route. Some of the courses had cross overs too, which added yet another obstacle to watch out for.

Graphics wise the game is great, with nice backgrounds and well-drawn environments.

Sound when playing is just a thud when you hit something, get used to this! The game has some nice sample speech and good music though.

On the down side, you could be really doing well and on course four, but failing this means you have to start all over again from the beginning. There is no option to retry that one race. This soon become frustrating, as a silly mistake means you have to go through all the other levels again.

Apart from that though, not a bad game, it could have done with a bit more sound when playing, and maybe a bit less drift, but still an enjoyable release.

JUNGLE FEVER

A&F 1983

This is Jungle Fever, and never a more frustrating game have I played on the Spectrum, and I have played a fair few.

The game obviously takes its ideas from Pitfall on the Atari 2600 including the jungle scenario, rope swings, crocodiles and other hazards. It then mashes them up and completely removes the gameplay and adds a whole pile of frustration.

The graphics are smooth if a little flickery and if you ever get past the second screen you will find much of the same through out the rest of the game.

Screen one is straight forward, giving you some hope of a half decent game. Here you just have to jump of three waterfalls and exit screen right. Once you get the timing and positioning right, this proves very easy. The next screen however, is a killer.

A gaping pit has to be swung across using a rope. Getting onto the rope is easy enough, most of the time, but getting off is a complete guess and you will find yourself plummeting into the pit again and again and again, and this soon gets annoying.

Once you finally manage it, the next screen sees you jumping over two randomly moving things. I have no idea what they are, but because they have no fixed pattern its impossible to plan your jumps, again its down to guess work and luck.

Once over this and it's back to the waterfalls, this time with what looks like a tree poking up at random. I guess these are supposed to be crocodiles.

Onward to the next screen and an arrow is introduced into the mix, making jumping that bit more tricky. But still that pit screen proves impossible.

All this game needed to make it more playable was an easier learning curve and enemies that followed fixed patterns, and this would let you make some progress.

As it is, Jungle Fever is just a mass of frustrating guesses that turn out bad most of the time..

I suggest you keep away from this one if you value your sanity.

ANDROID ONE

Vortex Software 1983

Android One is a very early game, before games needed an in depth story. All you needed to know was what you had to do, who you had to kill and what you had to destroy.

In the case of Android One, you control an android, no surprise there, and the mission is to fight your way to the reactor and destroy it before it explodes and kills everyone.

The game is not a frantic robot blasting game like *Robotron*, instead it has elements of planning, control and careful movement to reach the objective.

The reactor is at the far right of the playing area that takes up about 5 screens, and you have to guide your robot through various rooms infested with stationary and moving nasties.

Some of the walls can be shot creating routes into the next area, and when you reach the right hand side, the screen scrolls leaving the next are in view ready to be navigated.

Blasting in a set place will produce an easy route back, as once the reactor is destroyed, you have to get you robot back to the start to complete the mission.

Randomly making tunnels will only slow your return journey down and I find it best to create a straight pathway back as you don't have to destroy anything, just get back to the start.

There is a time limit, but it is long enough not to worry about.

The graphics are small but move smoothly enough

and the sound is adequate for this type of game. The only down side is the control system.

Instead of moving in the set direction, your android just rotates. You then walk and fire in that direction. This can become difficult at first, as you find yourself continually running into things, but once you get to grips with it, the game opens up and things start to happen without having to think about it.

Overall, this game isn't too taxing and can offer a short shot of excitement, and its one of those game I keep going back to.

It's a pity there aren't different level layouts, as this wold give you some incentive to keep going, but once complete, the same level has to be done again, this time with more nasties.

Its still a great little game and highly recommended.
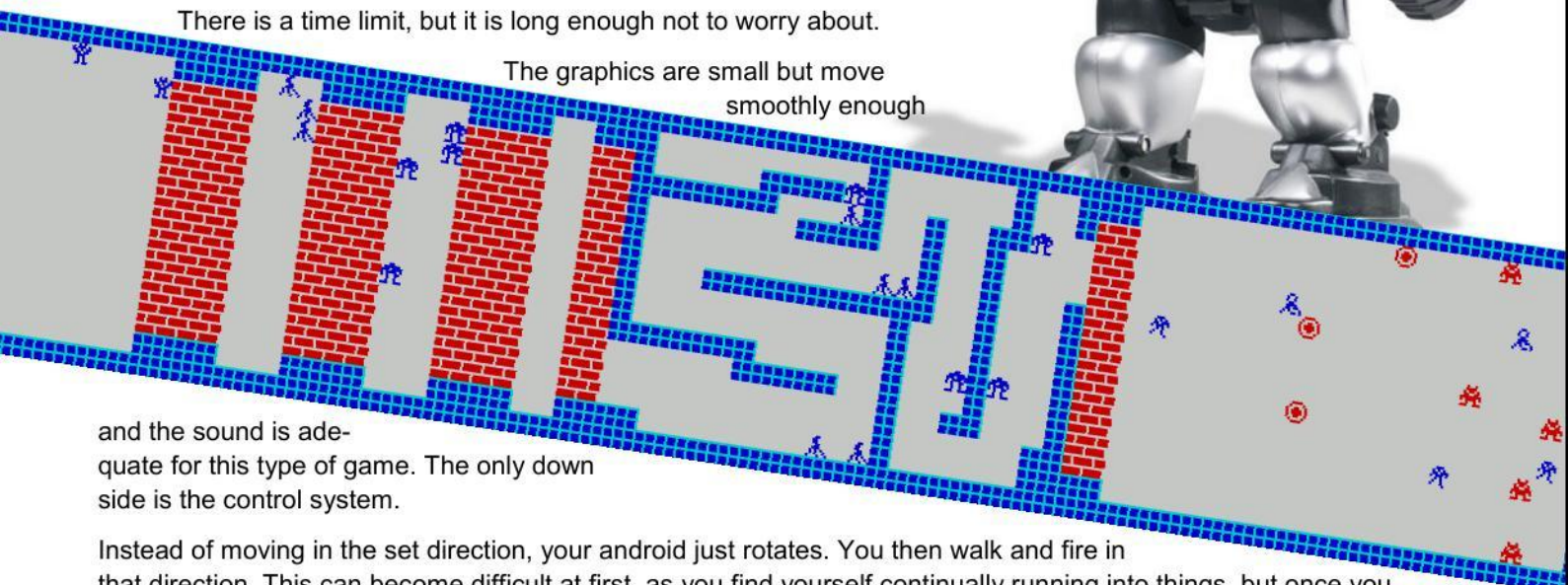
BEAR BOVVER

Artic Computing 1983

Bear Bovver is an early John Ritman game, and as many Spectrum fans know John went on to bring us some classics like Batman, Match Day and Head over Heels. This game though came a few years before those and had more simplistic gameplay.

The game is a cross between several other genres, notably *Panic* and *Burger Time*.

The idea is that Ted has just got his brand new Sinclair electric truck and wants to take it for a drive, but realises the batteries don't last very long.

He then notices some batteries high up on some scaffolding and sets off to collect them. Of course it's not as easy as that and there are several things out to stop him. Yes, it's pretty much *Burger Time* with bears and batteries.

The graphics are large and nicely coloured, the sound is good with a happy little tune playing throughout. I'm sure I could switch it off back in the 80's, and after some random key pressing I found out some keys not mentioned in the instructions.

Key 1 turns all sound off.

Key 2 just enables sound effects.

Key 4 turns the music back on.

Also – to quit baby bear mode press H… and then wait.. until the menu comes back up…

As each battery is collected, the truck moves a little further across the screen until eventually it reaches the other side and new level begins with different platforms, sorry scaffolding.

You can disperse the chasing enemies by dropping batteries on them or leaving a time bomb in their path. These are limited though, so you have to use them only in emergencies.

There are various bonuses to collect and some special gest enemies. I'm sure Jetman makes an appearance, but he never popped in during this review.

There is a learning mode, called baby bear mode, where your bear is invulnerable… this helps you get used to the controls.

Overall the game is a good *Burger Time*-like game,

but the pace is a little slow, but is still tricky to get right.

If you like the afore mentioned fast food game then this might just be a good alternative, otherwise it's a fair game that you may like or hate depending on your gaming preference.

I enjoyed it when I originally bought it, and I still find it good for a quick play now and again.

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

It was a sad day when my beloved Spectrum collection was sold to fund, of all things, a Commodore 64. It wasn't long before I yearned for my machine back along with all of the assorted games and peripherals I had amassed over a period of 6 or 7 years.

Some of my stuff - circa 1985

My collection wasn't massive, totalling about 100 games, a Lo-Pro keyboard, an Alphacom 32 printer, Interface one and three Microdrives, a Voyager 7 modem, a few assorted joysticks and a huge stack of magazines. I kept the magazines, but everything else was sold.

Discovering emulation in 1996 When Gerton Lunter released Z80 for the PC, threw me back into the world I had lost, but without the clutter. It was wonderful to load up the games I spent my hard earned cash on, and get that lovely warm feeling all over again.

It also gave me the chance to re-live my programming days. I rescued all of my game tapes from my parents loft and converted them to .SNA files, later .TAP files for completeness. All those games, most terrible, some quite good, I could now play again.

Not only that, but inspired by Spectacle (a teletext spoof found on side B of Dark Star), I wrote my own versions for my games. This gave me a kind of diary I could read again.

Emulation was great, and it meant you didn't have to have the original media, but in a way this wasn't a good thing. I took pride in my original collection, setting it out on my shelves just like the shop I always went to, and the games looked great, especially if you had a full collection from any given company.

I must have spent hundreds of pounds on games during the early eighties. Every Friday I would take my pay packet and go straight to a little shop called Dragon Byte, close to my parent's home. I would have swotted up on the new releases by scouring magazines like Crash, and be eager to hand over my cash.

The age of emulation...

The age of emulation took that away, but I was determined not to become what I jokingly called a 'plastic collector'. I didn't want piles of cassettes in my home, why would I? I was quite happy compiling the very first Spectrum Hardware Index (now on WOS), searching for new additions and keeping my little website up to date.

That however changed sometime in 1998 after a house move. During
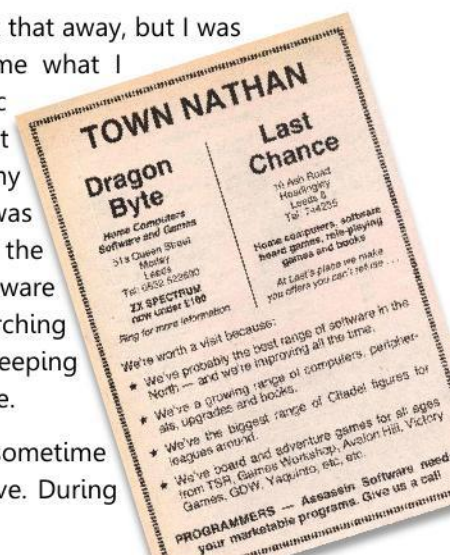
A crap game!

the clear out I found a box of Spectrum games that had somehow being missed when I sold my collection years previously. There were no rarities, or in fact anything special; Games Designer by Quicksilva, Dark Star by Design Design, Krazy Kong by C*Tech and Invasion Force by Artic.

Each game had a memory attached to it...

Holding these few pieces of plastic brought back many memories, each having their own story. Krazy Kong, as we all know, if an absolute horror of a game, but like many others, I bought the hype and sent for it mail order. I remember playing *Donkey Kong* in a leisure centre for a few weeks in preparation, and when it arrived I couldn't get the tape out of the bag quick enough. You can imagine my utter anger when the game loaded!

After this find, I searched e-Bay and was amazed to find thousands of original Spectrum games for sale at really

From tiny acorns....

cheap prices. I was tempted to blow a few hundred quid re-building my complete collection, but, with the house move, I had other commitments, and I still didn't want to collect plastic.

Real life got in the way for a few years, but in 2002 a friend who was moving house asked if I was still into Spectrums. Upon confirming I was, he handed over a box of twelve games, glad to get rid of them. This was the turning point.

Once home, I picked out each game one by one, cleaned the cases and admired the art work. Many of them were in my own long gone collection, and many brought back distinct memories.

This is the best game ever...

Manic Miner reminded me of when I went into the shop and the excited owner thrust the game into my hands. "This is the best game ever. If you don't like it, ill give you your money back twice over." It was also the game that he used as a joke for me and several other enthusiasts.

"I've just got Bandersnatch from an insider." he said, plonking a tape into the tape player and hitting LOAD. We all stood around in amazement, waiting to see this much hyped mega-game. The loading screen appeared, wow, it looked real and very convincing. The tape slowly gurgled away, and near the end it somehow sounded familiar... then up popped Manic Miner! The evil swine!

Stacking the games on a shelf, it was great to see them again, and I wanted more. I wanted my collection back, I wanted to use the real thing. Many of my early games were now quite rare and the asking prices was far too much, some costing over £20. I therefore decided on two approaches to build up my collection. First I would make a large bulk purchase that included some games I wanted and secondly I would then slowly build up one at a time if the price was right.

It was like 1983 all over again...

While waiting for the right large bundle, I began buying cheap games that I fondly recalled the first time round. It was like 1983 all over again. Getting home from work and seeing a padded envelope waiting for me was still exciting. Opening it up and holding that cassette, admiring the art work, loading the game into real hardware – I was a teenager again!

Building up slowly

My shelf looked pretty empty with just fifteen games, but that soon began to fill out. Each time I browsed eBay I would see a game that triggered memories and instantly place a bid. I didn't always win, I did set limits on how much I would pay for game, but still, my humble collection increased to around twenty five titles in a matter of months.

Where the hell did they all come form?

Then came the large bundle. 120 games for £50. I couldn't resist. I knew there were a few duplicates, but mixed in with that batch were a few personal favourites, a few that would add to individual company collections and a few games that sold individually for £10.

What was I doing? I was collecting plastic, something I said I wouldn't do and now I have around 300 games filling my shelf. They do look great though, and of course they all help when making The Spectrum Show.

I am trying to cut down now, opting to buy just the games I want to finish particular company collections and ones that complete a series.

It's still a great thrill...

It is still a great thrill to pluck a game from the shelf, start loading it into real hardware and read the inlay while waiting. There is a special connection, something that you just don't get with emulation. Many of the games, as mentioned previously hold memories and remind me of my youth.

I can vividly remember gaming moments; completing the third rocket in JetPac, Finding the treasure in Maziacs, completing Time Gate, causing Gobbleman to crash, seeing the train in 3D Tunnel and many more.

Slowly my game collection is growing, but at much less rate than before. Partly because I am running out of room and partly because I have most of the ones I wanted.

What am I still looking for?

So, what games am I still looking out for? Well, I wouldn't spoil my chances of winning them, so I'll just say this. I need one very expensive one to complete a series, one very cheap one to complete a company collection, one mid-range one to complete a company 1-10, and one or two personal favourites that currently sell for £12 each and rarely show up!

ROAD BLASTERS

US Gold 1988

you have keep an eye on it – as it runs out pretty quickly.

You can replenish this fuel by collecting orbs or reaching checkpoints.

Coupled with this are the other vehicles you have to shoot and road side canons that, for most of the time miss you, but can be on target just when you don't need them to be. You can take these out by clever driving and angling the car just right…. That takes practice though.

The driving aspect is good, with a nice feeling of speed and responsive controls.

The angle of your car changes as you take corners meaning you can fire in different directions – something that can be used to your advantage as mentioned earlier.

You also have to collect other weapons and power ups like nitro boost or missiles.

The other cars can drop spikes too, so you have to keep on your toes.

Every now and again you get a MINE warning and have to avoid mines placed in various lanes.

I initially thought the game was, for me, a little too difficult in the early stages, meaning for someone not accustomed to the controls or gameplay would find the fuel gauge empty and the game over far too quickly. Then I realised the game defaults to medium difficulty! Choosing rookie mode proves a much more welcoming game with a nice learning curve.

Road Blasters is another in a long line of arcade conversions from US Gold.

The arcade version took ideas from several other games like Pole Position and Spy Hunter and threw them together into a game that could easily be called Mad Max or even 3D Spy Hunter.

There is not much of a plot, but then again who really needs one when the idea is to drive, survive and shoot everything.

There is an added twist in that you only have a certain amount of fuel and

This is a great game with nice smooth graphics and good sound, and certainly one of the better arcade conversions to be attempted. Obviously it can't match the arcade, but it's still definitely worth trying….

ORION

This maze game is simple once you figure out what does what, and eventually proves quite challenging and enjoyable.

The idea is that you have to rescue stolen androids from an underground maze while avoiding the Dark Horde.

Green guards patrol the screen randomly and must be avoided or killed by using your shield.

You do this by triggering your shield as you make contact with them. You have limited shield power but it does build back up quickly when not I use, but you still need to keep an eye on it.

There are also other white creatures in the maze that when collected give you extra points but at the same time break your scanners causing the maze to partially vanish.

Saving an android fixes your scanners, but collecting two white aliens straight after each other will destroy your ship.

This may all sound a bit complex, but you soon get used to it and you'll find yourself running around from room to room quite happily after a few plays.

The graphics are large but move in character jumps so are obviously a little jerky. The are nicely drawn and animated with a variety of creatures on offer.

The control panel often flickers when there is a lot happening on the screen too which sometime cause a distraction.

The sound is good but there is an annoying inter-room sequence that soon gets very repetitive very quickly because you have to sit through it each time to exit a screen.
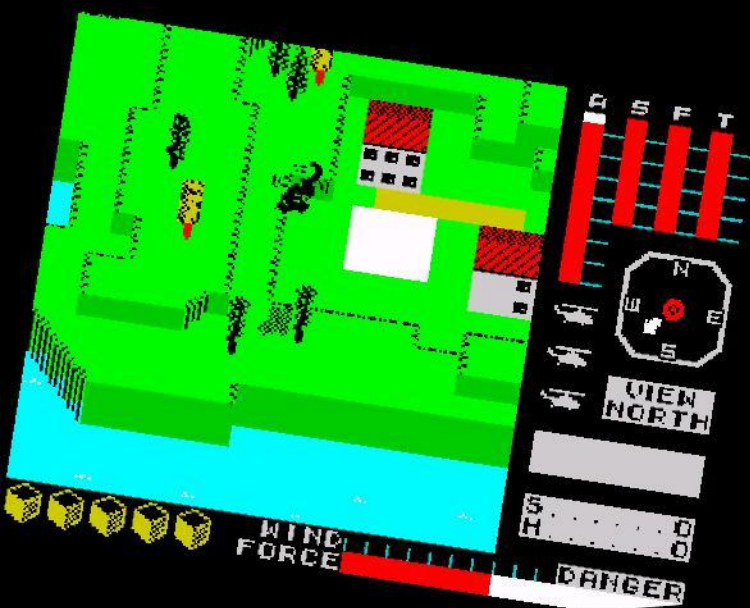
During gameplay there is a constant click as you move around, with sufficient affects for rescuing, operating your shield or dying.

Overall this is a nice little game to try but certainly not the best Software Projects game.
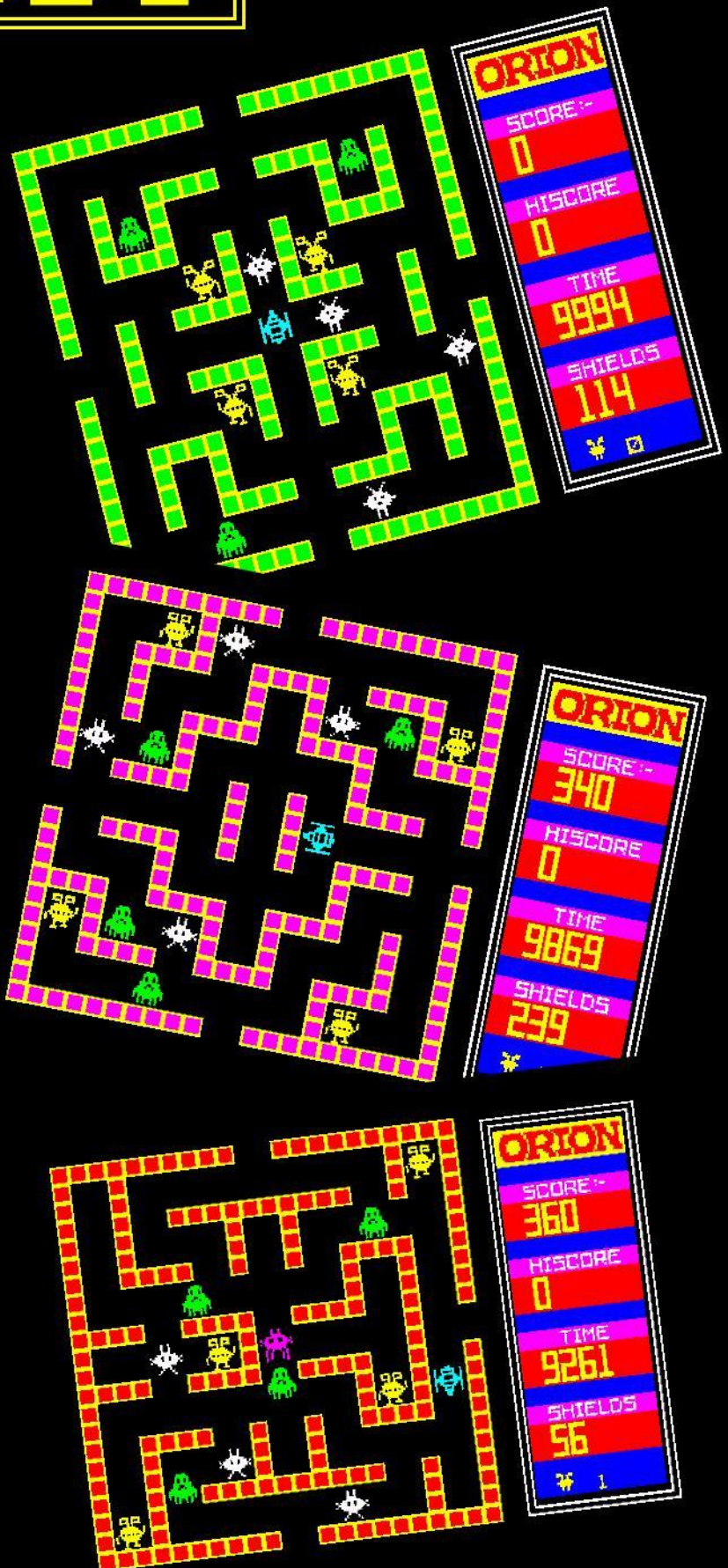
CYCLONE

Vortex 1985

Cyclone, released in 1985, was the second game by Vortex to use the engine developed by its founder and programmer Costa Panayi.

The engine was originally used in the fast paced TLL, or Tornado Low Level, but in Cyclone it is brought into a much slower, more strategic game, and some say for the better.

I certainly liked Cyclone better than its predecessor.

The object of the game is to pilot a helicopter around an area, collecting crates and for bonuses, rescuing people.

The area is quite large and consists of many small islands, each randomly holding a crate. The map view shows your location along with the location of a cyclone. This must be avoided at all costs, so you will be using the map view quite a lot.

As you fly closer to the cyclone, your helicopter begins to shake and control is more difficult. Get too close and you crash.

Your helicopter also needs fuel, and some islands have a helipad that can be used for this purpose.

The graphics are really good, and stand out as being something different from other Spectrum games. They offer a colourful view of the islands, with tress and houses, that can be switched to see behind the 3D hills in case a crate has been placed there.

You can crash into the landscape if you are not high enough and your altitude is shown on the control panel. You can fly into an air traffic zone where you can easily be hit by a plane if you are at the same height.

Controls are fairly simple to learn and are very responsive. You can increase or decrease altitude, rotate the helicopter and move forward.

When you find a crate or person to collect, you have to centre the chopper above them and slowly decrease altitude. At the right height , a hook will be deployed and you will pick up the item automatically.

There are 5 crates to collect, but it is not easy, as you have to continually keep away from the cyclone and keep an eye on your fuel. Knowing the nearest landing pad is essential if you want to complete your mission.

The screen layout is easy to read, providing all the information you need and giving you warnings of impending doom.

Overall then, this is a fantastic game and highly recommended.
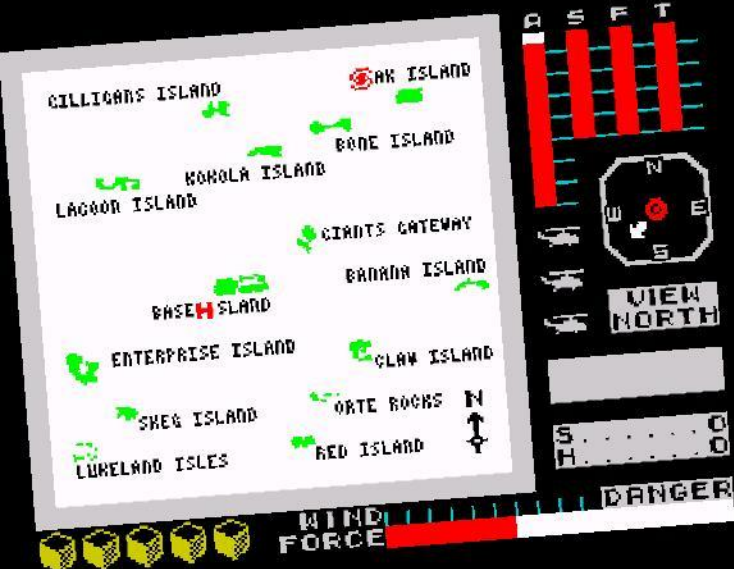
Alter Ego

Retro Souls 2011

I don't know how to explain this game to you other than it is an addictive platform, collect-em-up with great game play and a novel twist.

You control what is described as 'a hero' but what looks like a tiny man with a box on his head.

He has to collect dots placed on various platforms and avoid contact with some bouncy, one-legged skulls that patrol the afore mentioned platforms in set routes

What makes this game different though is the fact that you have a twin on screen at the same time.

He can't be killed but neither can he collect your dots.

You can switch places with him only a limited number of times on each level in order to avoid the bouncy monsters or to collect dots not accessible from your current position.

Later level includes dots that only your twin can collect, adding more of a challenge.

Each level is a puzzle in itself and you have to work out the best use of your jumps, as they are called, to make sure you collect all of the dots. Some levels have vanishing floor too, so you have to be very careful not to block yourself in.

You can fall from any height but not into the water at the bottom of the screen.

The number of moves/switches available to you is shown at the top left along with the number of lives you have.

The graphics are fabulous, well drawn and witty, and suit the gameplay well.

Control is responsive making the whole experience addictive and you want to keep playing to solve the next level.

This is a real brain tester, especially when you can switch both horizontally and vertically, and if this looks like the kind of game you would like, I can highly recommend it.

Go and play it now.

PROMENADE

ANOTHER PHANTOM

ABRACADABRA
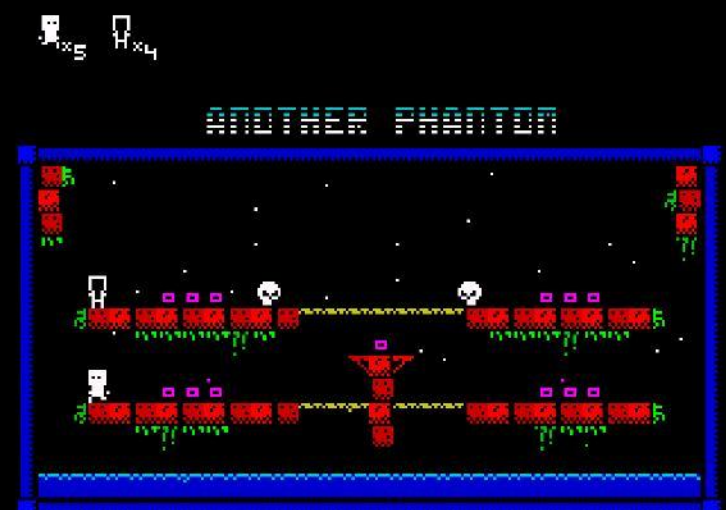
Genesis - Dawn Of A New Day is an outstanding horizontal shooter that does everything right.

I love shoot-em-ups, or in this case, shoot-em-across, but at the same time I am terrible at playing them. This game however, pitches the difficulty just right, providing enough of a challenge but allowing you to progress a little bit further, the more you play.

Like all horizontal shooters, the screen scrolls from right to left, and your ship has to blast anything that moves, collecting bonuses and power-ups along the way. The power-ups include homing missiles, triple shot and a little something named the mega-blast.

Similar to games like R-Type, you can fire in two different ways. Tap the fire button to fire normally, to hold the fire button and release to let fly with a more power blast similar to the traditional smart bomb.

Quality oozes from this game right from the loading screen, the intro music, the graphics, the scrolling, everything has been tweaking to perfection.

Control is crisp, which it needs to be, as each set of aliens head towards you in different patterns.

At the end of each level there is a boss to beat, taking the usual mixture of dodging and firing to defeat.

The level graphic vary from futuristic landscapes to strange alien worlds, each having their own alien type and ground emplacements.

The ship also has inertia, that can prove tricky to master, especially in tight situations. Luckily this can be turned off to give a more standard, and easier to control movement.

Graphic and sound a great, with nice animations and sound effects, and everything comes together to form a game that any shoot-em-up fan should try.

Can you tell that I like this game?

Shoot-em-up fans celebrate!

Sinclair Interface One and the ZX Microdrive

The beauty of the Sinclair Spectrum, and other home micros at the time, was their ability to store data on standard cassettes. The same cassettes you used to tape songs from the radio, and that were cheap and easy to purchase.

The early, small programs and type-ins were very rarely over 10k in size and could be saved and loaded in around 2 minutes, usually less, with some commercial games being just 4k in size.

As the games grew and the available memory moved from 16 to 48k, loading times increased and it wasn't unusual to be waiting five minutes before you could play your favourite game.

Companies tried to address this using custom, turbo loaders, but this had the knock-on effect of making them difficult to load as the read/write heads of the average tape recorder were not all aligned the same.

The age of disc storage was looming and there were many companies producing their own systems, but the inherent cost, sometimes equal to the computer itself, meant the technology had limited sales.

Microfloppy?

In April 1982, when Sinclair originally revealed the ZX Spectrum, they also announced a new and affordable storage medium, the Microdrive. Its initial description was of a single microfloppy, but as time moved on and

the technical issues began to bite, this was changed to single storage medium.

Eventually when released, Sinclair had cut corners again and created a single long tape loop system. This meant that the tape had to run through continuously until it located the data you wanted, not an ideal solution, but one that worked and one that didn't cost a lot.

This device saw multiple delays and technical problems before the public finally got their hands on it in September 1983 – only 17 months after it was first announced.

The Tape Loop System...

The Microdrive required Interface one, which came with the drive in a special package, and could also be bought as additional units on their own.

Interface 1 was designed to sit underneath the Spectrum, tiling the keyboard to a more comfortable angle. The Microdrive unit plugged into this with a short ribbon cable.

Interface 1 also had a pass through port and an RS232 compatible, 9 pin port as well as Sinclair's own network port that allowed up to 64 Spectrums to be connected together.

If you wanted you could use the screws to permanently fix the interface to your micro.

The interface also allowed up to 8 Microdrive units to be plugged in, if you had the desk space.

Early Interface 1 units often overheated, and resulted in a large disfigured patch. This problem was fixed in later version though.

Once connected and the Spectrum switched on, the commands designed to work with the Microdrive were made available.

The cartridges were small, being just 4.5cm long and 3.5 cm wide, and came in a small plastic case. Pulling this off allowed you to see the tape loop, and was necessary before you could plug it in.

Once plugged in, you were ready...

The commands were a bit long and convoluted, but once you had learnt them, they became second nature.

LOAD *"m";1;"miner"

Formatting took around 20 seconds and left you with between 70 and 85k of free space. Saving and loading data, again used long commands, but was still much faster than cassette. The number indicated which drive unit to use if you had more than one.

As with the Wafadrive, reviewed in a previous issue, any storage device is only as good as the software for it, and although the Microdrive had more than the Wafadrive, there was not wide spread support from software houses,

mainly due to the cost of the cartridges.

The other problem for new buyers was transferring your existing collection of commercial software.

This was difficult due to the protection systems used, even with commercial copiers, things rarely worked for more than one game or two.

The most successful method was the Multiface. A small device plugged into the back that allowed any software to be frozen and saved to cartridge. This obviously also meant more cash though, and another device plugged into the back of your computer.

Speed wise, the device proved very fast, and I tested this using the same game I used to test the Wafadrive. Bug-Byte's The Birds and The Bees.

Sinclair Interface One and the ZX Microdrive

This 32k game take around 2 minutes 25 seconds to load from cassette, having transferred it to Microdirve, the time came down to just 20 seconds, which was impressive.

32k loaded in 20 seconds

The Wafadrive could only manage 60 seconds.

When connected, the unit looks great, especially with the rubber-keyed Spectrum, and was high on the list of peripherals for many owners.

It came into its own if you developed your own software, loading and saving your work could now be much faster and less error prone.

Sinclair were often criticised for their build quality, but these 30 year old units can still be purchased from eBay in fully working condition. The cartridges though are a different matter, and have a habit of self-destructing.

Self destruction...

The felt pads that hold the tape in place so that the read/write heads make contact often disintegrate leaving the cartridges useless, with a good chance of the debris collecting inside the drive itself.

Overall then, a great system that should have been brought to market sooner, which in my opinion, would have changed the future of the machine and become the standard storage medium.

As it is, being nearly 2 years late, the use of cassettes became fixed and the unit didn't do as well as it should have.

A real pity.. as I love this device... just sound of it brings back happy memories of late night programming sessions knowing when that wurring noise stopped, you had your data safely stored.

Yet another example of classic Sinclair design that was cheap to produce and did the job.

BUGGY BOY

Elite 1988

Buggy Boy was an arcade racing game released in 1985 by Tatsumi.

The game was simple enough, drive around several different courses in the shortest possible time, avoiding collisions, collecting points and extra time, and jumping over obstacles and other buggies.

The game was converted to most home formats with different degrees of success, but how would the Spectrum version compare?

Without the dedicated 3D hardware of the arcade, this version wasn't too bad.

Released in 1988 by Elite Systems in both 48 and 128K flavours.

The 128k version has nice music and better sounds, but the gameplay on both machines is the same.

The game maintains the large chunky graphics of the arcade, but I think they are just a little too large, giving very little room to move in the screen space.

The courses are the same as the arcade although they seem shortened, and it takes less time to get to notable sections like the tunnels or bridges.

Graphics wise it's not bad. The buggy is colourful, the tracks get close to the arcade but things do move slower – I suppose that is to be expected.

Controls is sometimes sluggish, as is the gameplay, and it takes a while to get used to them. Things are more difficult due to the previously mentioned large buggy.

Most of the arcade elements are here, rocks, gates, flags and even the sound resembles the real thing – but there is no tumbling buggy when you hit something, instead you just explode.

After the explosion it takes ages to get back to racing, as the screen slowly scrolls across, places the buggy back on screen and finally you get to carry on.

The gear change too was tricky at first. The arcade game was manual – if you crashed you had to switch to low gear or you would struggle to get going. The Spectrum version automatically drops you to low gear and then stops you from switching up until you hit a certain speed.

Gameplay wise, I would have said average – but after 30 minutes, it began to grow on me – maybe because I had adjusted to the controls and the collision detection – which can sometime be off slightly.

The large buggy does reduce playability, the sluggish controls often cause frustration and the removal of the tumbling buggy just slows things down.

If you decide to give this game a go, give yourself time to get used to the controls and mechanics. That will probably be about 4 or 5 games... because then you will get a better game...

SCRAMBLE

SHOOT OUT

Scramble was released to the arcade in 1981 by Konami, although the game itself was developed by Stern.

It boasted being the first horizontal shooter with forced sideways movement, in that the landscape scrolled regardless of whether you moved or not.

It also had distinct levels with changing aliens attack waves and different strategies, not to mention the ever decreasing fuel, replenished only be destroying fuel pods.

There is a lot going on here for the Spectrum to copy.

Not only smooth scrolling but multi-directional movement, missiles and bombs, some of the most iconic arcade sounds ever to come from an arcade cabinet... not to mention the range of different landscapes and obstacles.

Let's take a look at how it got on....

Avenger - Abacus Programs 1982

Being a very early release it is no surprise that this game is far from arcade perfect. The landscape judders across the screen and the ship is limited to just up and down, there is no left and right.

You have a laser and bombs, but use the laser too much and it will overheat and then fire only slowly.

Ground based enemies fire projectiles at you that can only be destroyed by your bombs, your laser is useless on them. The best plan I found was to just keep bombing in the hope of destroying them.

The laser can be used to kill air-born enemies, that also fire missiles back at you, making for a sometimes very busy screen.

There is no fuel element to this game, which I suppose is a good thing considering how many other things you have to remember and avoid.

Your ship has five shields that can take hits from anything except the landscape, once drained you lose that ship.

The graphics are basic and move in character based jumps and the sound is limited to just two effects. One for the laser and one for when something is destroyed.

The levels do not change, the landscape does not change and there are no meteors in later levels like the arcade.

If you do manage to get far enough into the game, for some reason a huge nuclear explosion erupts and destroys your ship. I had no idea why until many many games later when I realised that if you destroy the small white blobs, this causes the explosion! So this is yet another thing to keep an eye on.

All in all, a below average attempt that not only has many of the arcade elements missing, but has terrible gameplay too.

Cavern Fighter - Bug Byte Software 1983

This is much more polished game than the previous one with some nice smooth scrolling and large colourful graphics. The landscape is not solid like the arcade, but we can forgive this game as it's really nice to play, if a little difficult.

The ship has full movement, lasers and bombs, and a fuel gauge to keep an eye on. There are ground based rockets to avoid, shoot or bomb along with the fuel pods to keep your ship flying.

The game has different levels, but they don't adhere to the arcade. The background changes colour and the enemies change. We do get meteors in later levels, but to be honest you'd have to be a good player to get that far.

One section changes the landscape from caves to square flashing blocks, presumably to mimic the arcade level, but this just looks awful, it's like being in an 80's disco.

As the game progresses, things speed up making it very hard to play. The cave roof becomes lower giving you hardly any space to manoeuvre, and I think had it been a little easier, this game would be a top contender.

A competent version then, that has set the level that all others have to aim for.

SCRAMBLE SHOOT OUT

GROUND ATTACK - SILVERSOFT 1982

This is the version I bought, and to tell you the truth was very disappointed with. I knew I had to play it for this shoot out and was interested in seeing if I felt the same playing afresh.

First impressions were the game was much better than I re-membered despite the character based scrolling. Not all of the arcade elements are here, and some don't replicate the arcade. For example there are fuel pods to blow up, but there is no fuel limit, so destroying them just adds to your score.

Levels are limited to just two , the initial landscape, followed by the cave system. From then on the cave just gets narrower, alt-hough there are colour changes as you progress.

There are no meteors, just flashing... things... no idea what they are.. so just shoot them anyway..

Control can be a little sticky at times but not so much as to detract from the gameplay, which is not bad at all once you get into it and you get deeper into the levels. The first couple of levels can be quite dull, but things soon begin to hot up as you progress.

I actually enjoyed playing this game second time round, and managed to get far enough as not to feel the difficulty was set too hard.

A nice game then that drifts a little from the arcade but is still worth a look.

GALACTIC GUNNERS - CYBEXLAB SOFTWARE 1987

This takes Scramble and adds a few extra twists, but there is no doubt the game is based on the arcade favourite.

The strangely shaped ship flies over smooth scrolling land-scapes and is equipped with the usual lasers and bombs.

Dropping bombs is tricky, especially if you play the game with a joystick, as you have to hold the fire button, this of course means you can't fire at the same time. It's not bad once you get used to it, but there is a delay in firing because of this, which can lead to you missing your target.

Control is crisp and responsive and the game just flows really nicely. Sound is top notch, with good effects and nice little tunes when you get bonuses.

Here is the first branch from the original. You collect bonuses that give you shields and power-ups, something that is certainly required for the tougher levels. Talking of levels, this game has ten of them, all smoothly scrolling and nice-ly drawn, and delight to play through.

Enemies vary and at the end of each level is a boss, again different from the arcade, but it does add an extra dimen-sion. Some may say this game, with its power-ups and boss battles, is not Scramble, but in my opinion it is certainly pretty close, and the additions do provide varied and interesting gameplay.

It takes the basic arcade game, adds more variety and the end result is a damn fine game.

Hidden City - Bytewell 1983

I am not really sure if this game should be included as it does not follow the arcade game and has many differences, but the idea and some of the gameplay is the same.

The first level you just have to get across the screen avoiding the lasers. The next level you gather fuel, you must have enough to complete your mission. Then the last level brings us to the Scramble like gameplay.

Fly through the cave and destroy the enemy base.

Having done this however, you are just left flying across a flat land until your fuel runs out. Maybe I should have got more fuel? But I'm sure I had enough.

The game intro states you have to get a certain score to win, but I can't see how to get that score, and certainly played it enough times. I think the key is to collect all fuel and shoot all end of level bases.

Anyway... this game is best left alone if you are looking for some serious Scramble action.

Kamakaze - JK Greye 1982

Another early game and another character-based scrolling, 8 pixel graphic adorned shooter.

The landscape judders past and we get the usual land based rockets and fuel pods.

Later levels introduce a roof to form the cave system, and flashing boxes that I think are supposed to be meteors.

There is no horizontal movement of your ship, just up and down, which limits survival. That coupled with the restriction on firing means most games are very short.

When you fire or drop a bomb, you cannot fire again until your laser either hits something or reaches the end of the screen. This often causes you to crash into something as you are lining up your shot but don't have anything to fire.

Sound is minimalistic with a horrendous sound when you lose a life. At this point the game stops for a few seconds, your ship is pasted back into position, and the game continues – absolutely awful!!

Gameplay is difficult because of all the limitations I have mentioned, and even playing on slow speed, getting far is a challenge and something that you probably don't want to try again anyway.

One to bypass I think.

SCRAMBLE SHOOT OUT

Lunar Attack - SK Soft 1984

Now this game first appeared as a type-in in Your Computer magazine under the name Bomb Alley, but because it was subsequently a commercial release, it gets a place in the tests.

The game has some nice graphics, with dual coloured landscapes that change per level. This makes it look really nice and it's a pity about the jerky scrolling.

Your ship looks like the arcade version but the scrolling is nowhere near smooth enough, again being in character jumps. Luckily though it has full movement with separate keys for bombs and lasers, although the key combinations are a little tricky to get used to.

Ground based missiles are nicely done and fuel pods have to be destroyed to keep your ship flying.

Playing the game for ages didn't seem to get me into a cave system or city, but the landscape did change colour. There are meteors on later levels, but they move at the same speed as the landscape meaning they are just things to avoid rather than dodge like the arcade game.

There are also bouncing aliens in later level, although they are just green blobs.

The game is well done for a type-in, but not sure it could be considered a good release for 1984. Having said that, it is much better than some of the earlier games.

Scramble - Kryton Force 1984

Here we get a helicopter flying through caves, like the second stage of the arcade game.

The landscape judders by, and the controls are very sluggish, often causing you to crash or hit an enemy item.

The missiles in this version only appear after a good 15 minutes of playing, by which time you just want it to stop. There are ground based pods to bomb and fuel dumps. Fuel is limited and can be replenished by bombing these like the arcade.

There are moving aliens to either shoot or avoid, and if you get far enough, you will see what I think are meteors, but they could be anything really.

There is no horizontal player movement, just up and down, which limits the gameplay and causes rapid changes in direction to try and avoid the aliens.

Sound is restricted to the standard machine code zaps found in practically all early arcade clones, and the game pauses when playing them.

Penetrator - Melbourne House 1983

Now we come to probably the best known of our games. I don't know what can be said about this game that has not already been said. After the fireworks and siren, the game kicks off and we are treated to a damn fine shooter.

The landscape is wireframe rather than solid, and scrolls smoothly along. Your ship, which differs in shape from the arcade, but still looks cool, handles very well, having full directional control. The forward key is also used for firing, which is annoying, as you are continually stabbing at the key and moving forward each time you fire. Firing and bombing work well apart from that, and the gameplay is spot on.

Danger   Ships   3

The tune that plays between each life soon gets annoying though, and you just want to get back into the action.

The game has different levels with different colours. First the normal landscape, then two cave systems and then the final city. There are ground based missiles and bouncing aliens, but no meteors sadly. There is also no fuel limit and the fuel pods have been replaced by radar stations. The instructions claim that failing to destroy these mean the missiles become more accurate, although I have no idea if this is true or not.

This game also has another amazing feature, a level designer. Yes, you can build your own levels and save them to tape so your friends can play them. A great little addition that certainly extends the game's life, and something I spent ages messing about with when I first bought this game.

A great game then, but one that still has things missing.

Scramble - Mikro-Gen 1983

For an early Mikro-gen game it displays all the typical features.

Character based scrolling and those all too familiar sound effects used by Mikro-gen for most of its 1983 games. That said, it's not a bad game and includes many of the arcade elements.

We get ground based missiles that launch upwards, fuel pods and a fuel limit, and distinct levels, four of them.

This is also one of the few games that actually sends us to the underground city.

Score;430   Fuel;41
                   Max;

Controls are slightly different to the arcade, and instead of horizontal free movement, we get a thrust key. This sends the ship forwards... releasing the key and it slowly moves back to the left hand side of the screen.

The ship is also continually dropping bombs with no keys presses required.

Control is responsive, and the game has several options for speed and starting level. This at least lets you see all the levels of the game if you are a bad player.

Sound is minimal, you get the familiar Mikro-gen laser sound plus an explosion when you die. Nothing else.

Not a bad game overall and certainly worth trying out.

SCRAMBLE SHOOT OUT

Spectrum Scramble - Workforce 1982

A really early attempt at the arcade game that just doesn't get anything right.

Horrible graphics and colour scheme, jerky scrolling and awful key layout..

The missiles are replaced by large bullets firing diagonally, there is a fuel limit, but I couldn't quite figure out what to destroy to increase it.

The stages seem to repeat several times before the next level starts, but on the plus side, there are bouncing aliens and meteors, although I wouldn't celebrate the fact.

Sqamble - Johnathan Cauldwell 1993

I have mixed feelings about this game..

Yes it has lovely large and well animated graphics, yes the control is very responsive, yes there is a fuel limit, missiles, meteors and bouncing aliens, yes there is even a city level, yes the sound is adequate (if you run it on a 128k machine – otherwise it will be silent) but....

For me at least it was very difficult to get far and this just made playing it a bit of a chore.

I admit I am not the best gamer, but can usually get to level 3 or 4 in the arcade version, but not on this game.

The large meteors that are always present, causing havoc, especially in tight caves or narrow city spaces, if I could get that far, which was very rarely. A few less could have improved gameplay no end.

There are added elements too, like the saving of humans, which is a nice feature, but the game on balance, doesn't have an end, it just repeats and with something this difficult you may not even want to try and complete it.

If you are an above average gamer then certainly give this a go, it's a good game.

Sadly I must be rubbish... oh well..

Phews! Gaming over... now for the winner...

SCRAMBLE

SHOOT OUT

THE WINNERS

Before I name the game I must say there isn't a fully featured version on the Spectrum. Every game has something missing, but, we have to go on what we have.

The choice was a very difficult one between two games. One is closer to the arcade game, but for me the other one plays better.

Arcade-Like

Stage 1. Player -1- Score   100

So… if you want a game that nearly matches the arcade – your choice is Penetrator from Melbourne House.

Danger   Ships   3

Playability

If, however, you want a game that is great to play and drifts away slightly – the game for you is Galactic Gunners by CybexLab Software.

Both are great games for different reasons and I know most Spectrum owners will have played Penetrator, so why not try Galactic Gunners and see what you think…

THE UK VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY HAD TO START SOMEWHERE...

FROM
BEDROOMS
TO
BILLIONS

A SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY THAT SPARKED A REVOLUTION

http//www.frombedroomstobillions.com